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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000779

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018  
TAGS: MOPS PREL PGOV AF EZ  
SUBJECT: DEFIANT OPPOSITION LEADER BLOCKING CZECH  
AFGHANISTAN DEPLOYMENT

REF: A. 16 DECEMBER 2008 THOMPSON-JONES/GARBER ET AL.  
E-MAIL  
B. 12 DECEMBER 2008 PRAGUE DAILY  
C. 11 DECEMBER 2008 PRAGUE DAILY  
D. 10 DECEMBER 2008 PRAGUE DAILY.

Classified By: Ambassador Richard Graber, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador Graber, together with the UK, Dutch, and Polish ambassadors to the Czech Republic, called on Czech opposition Social Democrat (CSSD) leader Jiri Paroubek December 17 to underscore Allied concern over an impasse in the Czech parliament regarding the Czech overseas troop deployments in Afghanistan. An angry, defiant Paroubek refused to budge, saying he would only allow CSSD MPs to vote for the resolution if PM Topolanek agreed to support a CSSD health care reform package. As set forth in refs A-D, Czech PM Mirek Topolanek and Paroubek are at an impasse over the resolution authorizing the deployments. The current deployment authorization ends December 31, 2008. As a stop-gap measure if no agreement can be reached, the Czech government may be able to extend deployments for 60 days after December 31 and seek compromise. Otherwise, under the Czech constitution, the government would be required to withdraw its troops by late February. Parliament is scheduled to take up the deployment resolution again on December 19. End Summary.

NATO Ambassadors Call on Opposition Leader Paroubek

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12. (C) As set forth in ref A, in light of the impasse, Ambassador Graber invited several other NATO ambassadors in Prague to join him on a call to Paroubek to underscore concern over the impasse on Czech troop deployments in Afghanistan. Ambassadors from the UK, the Netherlands and Poland agreed to join. The Embassy has also previously made our concern known to the Czech MFA and Defense Ministry.

13. (C) UK Ambassador Linda Duffield opened the meeting by expressing appreciation for the Czech role in Afghanistan and concern over the impasse. However, Duffield added, troop deployments should not be subject to domestic politics.

Deployments for Domestic Health Care Package

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14. (C) An angry and unsmiling Paroubek replied that PM Topolanek's government was corrupt and had failed to adequately consult him on the deployment issue. However, citing CSSD campaign promises, Paroubek said the impasse could be resolved "in ten minutes" if PM Topolanek agreed to support a CSSD health care reform package. Otherwise, Paroubek repeatedly vowed not to give in to pressure on the

deployment resolution.

¶15. (C) Ambassador Graber told Paroubek the Allies did not want to get into internal political disputes. However, deployments are an important issue, and failure to authorize Czech troops could endanger other countries' troops. (Note: Ambassador Volker and the NATO SecGen made similar appeals to Paroubek during his November trip to NATO. End Note) Dutch Ambassador Jan Lucas Inayat Van Hoorn told Paroubek that he was carrying a message from the Dutch PM, strongly urging that he find a way to resolve the issue. Ambassador Duffield pointed out that Paroubek had not previously publicly linked the deployment resolution to health care legislation.

¶16. (C) Paroubek claimed that PM Topolanek's government was "buying" MPs, and repeated his assertion that the government had failed to consult him on deployments. He said he was in a position of strength vis-Q-vis the government on the issue, and the government would have to compromise.

Paroubek Vows Not to Give In

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¶17. (C) Ambassador Graber expressed the group's disappointment and frustration with Paroubek's stance. Ambassadors Duffield and Van Hoorn told Paroubek they thought compromise was reached in the deployment issue when the government agreed to a lower number of troops for Afghanistan than it originally proposed. Paroubek shot back, asking rhetorically why there had been no demarches about the Topolanek government's corruption. "Tell Topolanek," he

PRAGUE 00000779 002 OF 002

said, "that I will never give in."

¶18. (C) Comment: Paroubek appeared impervious to appeals to logic, loyalty to allies, or Czech national interest. True to form, he is basing his stance on calculations of domestic personal political advantage. However, Paroubek has a point about the Topolanek government's clumsy handling of the foreign deployment resolution, particularly the failure to consult with the opposition early and often. Now, under the Czech constitution, PM Topolanek believes he has the authority to extend Czech overseas deployments for 60 days. However, this is uncharted territory. There has never previously been a situation in which Czech troops have been overseas absent parliamentary authorization. There is a small chance the Topolanek government can scrape together enough votes in the lower house to pass the resolution (per ref B, the Czech Senate, where the government enjoys majority support, has already approved it). However, a deal between Paroubek and PM Topolanek would be a surer way to get the necessary votes.

¶19. (C) Comment (continued): Parliament will take up the deployment resolution and the CSSD's health care proposal again on December 19. Paroubek and Topolanek will thus have time to work out a deal, although there is no guarantee they will do so. In this negotiation, the problem for PM Topolanek is not just foreign deployments, but the fact that for many of Topolanek's own coalition MPs, the CSSD proposal to eliminate health care payments has great appeal. In the longer run, if Topolanek and Paroubek cannot compromise on this, it is difficult to imagine they can reach a deal on missile defense, a much more controversial issue. End Comment.

Graber